

## The Priestly Raising of the Hands and other Trinitarian Images in Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogue against the Jews*

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### Abstract

Petrus Alfonsi's popular *Dialogue against the Jews* introduces several innovations to *adversus Iudaeos* literature in the twelfth century. This text, written by a convert from Judaism, appeals to Scripture, philosophical reason, science, and the Talmud in order to convict Jews of error. Moreover, Alfonsi introduced several novel trinitarian images that drew not only from the text of Scripture but also from observations of contemporary Jewish ritual practice. Some of his observations of contemporary Jewish practices were incorporated by later Christian polemicists, helping perhaps to draw attention to the *realia* of living Jewish communities.

### Keywords

Jewish-Christian Debate, medieval; Synagogue ritual, Priestly blessing; Petrus Alfonsi; Anselm of Canterbury; Peter of Blois; Talmud; Trinity, allegorical images

### Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Twelfth Century

In Christian anti-Jewish polemics, the twelfth-century represents a period of dramatic innovation and expansion. It is generally acknowledged that more anti-Jewish Latin polemics were written in the twelfth century than in all the earlier Christian centuries combined. Not only did their number increase, but the tactics employed in such texts began to shift as well. Conservative Christian polemicists would continue to cite scriptural proof texts in defense of Christian doctrine, but, by the beginning of the twelfth century, philosophical polemics appeared whose goal was to convict Jews of error and defend Christian truths by an almost exclusive appeal to reason. Anselm of Canterbury remains the most well known example of a twelfth-century theologian who had turned to reason and dialectic to dis-

cover rational proof for fundamental Christian doctrines. Although Anselm attempted to guard the principle that “unless you believe you will not understand” (Isa. 7:9),<sup>1</sup> nevertheless faith must seek understanding with the employment of reason and dialectic.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Anselm claims in his *Monologion* and *Proslogion* that what is held by faith can be proved by necessary reasons, apart from the authority of Scripture<sup>3</sup>—for example, the Trinity in the case of the *Monologion*<sup>4</sup> and the existence of God in the *Proslogion*. Similarly, in *Cur Deus Homo* he attempts to prove for his student Boso the necessity of the Incarnation, to overthrow the criticism of unbelievers—perhaps Jews or Muslims.<sup>5</sup> In his preface, Anselm remarks that in the first

<sup>1</sup> See Anselm's discussion in his *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*, 1, in *Opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, 6 vols. (Rome and Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1938-61), 2:7-8.

<sup>2</sup> For a study of the application of this principle, see Marilyn McCord Adams, “*Fides quaerens intellectum*: St. Anselm's Method in Philosophical Theology,” *Faith and Philosophy*, 9, no. 4 (1992): 409-35.

<sup>3</sup> In his *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*, 6, Anselm notes that the existence of the God of the Trinity has been demonstrated to the reader in both his *Proslogion* and *Monologion* by “necessary reasons”: “Si quis legere dignabitur duo parva mea opuscula, *Monologion* scilicet et *Proslogion*, quae ad hoc maxime facta sunt, ut quod fide tenemus de divina natura et eius personis praeter incarnationem, necessariis rationibus sine scripturae auctoritate probari possit.” *Opera omnia*, 2: 20. For the various senses in which the reader may understand a proof determined according to necessary reasons (which extend from the conclusions of a deductive syllogism to conclusions that are deemed fitting or suitable), see Victor W. Roberts, “The Relation of Faith and Reason in St. Anselm of Canterbury,” *American Benedictine Review*, 25 (1974): 494-512. On Anselm's understanding of reason, faith, and truth in the *Proslogion*, see Yves Cattin, “Proslogion et De Veritate, ‘Ratio, Fides, Veritas,’” in *Les mutations socio-culturelles au tournant des XI<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Actes du Colloque international du CNRS, Études Anselmiennes (IV<sup>e</sup> session) (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1984), 595-610.

<sup>4</sup> Anselm remarks that it should suffice for one investigating the Trinity that, although in the deepest sense the *how* of the Trinity remains incomprehensible, it can still be proved by necessary reasons *that* God is trinitarian. See *Monologion*, 64, in *Opera omnia*, 1:75. On the sense implied by necessary reasons, see also Paul Vignaux, “Nécessité des raisons dans le *Monologion*,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 64, no. 1 (1980): 3-25.

<sup>5</sup> For this intended audience, see René Roques, “La méthode de Saint Anselme dans le ‘Cur Deus Homo,’” *Aquinas: Ephemerides Thomisticae*, 5 (1962): 3-57. Alternatively, Anna Sapir Abulafia has insisted that the real target of *Cur Deus Homo* is Roscelin of Compiègne and other “heretics of dialectic.” See her “Christians Disputing Disbelief: St. Anselm, Gilbert Crispin and Pseudo-Anselm,” in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1992), 133-34; and her “St. Anselm and those Outside the Church,” in *Faith and Identity*, ed. D. Loades and K. Walsh, *Studies in Church History*, subsidia 6 (Oxford: B. Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1990), 27-35.

book of *Cur Deus Homo* he will treat the matter leaving Christ to one side, as if nothing were known of him, and "prove by necessary reasons that it is impossible for anyone to be saved without him."<sup>6</sup>

Another typical example of this type of philosophical religious polemic is Odo of Tournai's *Disputatio contra Judaeum Leonem nomine de adventu Christi Filii Dei* (*Disputation with a Jew Named on the Advent of the Christ the Son of God*), written circa 1105-6.<sup>7</sup> Like the work of his contemporary, Anselm of Canterbury, Odo's disputation, in the form of a dialogue with a Jew, eschews appeal to the Bible and attempts to demonstrate the truth of the Incarnation *sola ratione*. This emphasis on rational demonstration is a new development. Among the polemics of Gilbert Crispin (d. 1117), while his *Disputatio Judei et Christiani* (composed in the last decade of the eleventh century) represents a more traditional appeal to Scripture, his *Disputatio cum Gentili* provides an attempt, though a less successful one, to defend Christian faith with reasoned arguments.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "[P]robat rationibus necessariis esse impossibile ullum hominem salvari sine illo." *Cur Deus Homo*, in *Opera omnia*, 2:42. Again, although Anselm invokes "necessary reasons," G. R. Evans has argued that in this work Anselm seeks no more than to discover suitable, common sense arguments that will appear convincing to any open-minded listener. See Gillian R. Evans, "The *Cur Deus Homo*: The Nature of St. Anselm's Appeal to Reason," *Studia Theologica*, 31, no. 1 (1977): 33-50.

<sup>7</sup> The text of Odo's *Disputatio contra Judaeum Leonem nomine de adventu Christi Filii Dei* will be found in J.-P. Migne's *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina* (hereafter *PL*) 221 vols. (Paris), 160:1103-12. No critical edition has been produced, though my study and translation of the text corrects Migne's edition by comparison with several other manuscripts. See my *Two Theological Treatises of Odo of Tournai: On Original Sin, and a Debate with the Jew, Leo, Concerning the Advent of Christ, the Son of God* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> See *The Works of Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster*, ed. G. R. Evans and A. Sapir Abulafia, *Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi*, no. 8 (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1986). A recent German-Latin edition of his two polemics has appeared under the title *Disputatio iudaei et christiani: Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi; Religionsgespräche mit einem Juden und einem Heiden*, trans. Karl Werner Wilhelm and Gerhard Wilhelmi (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005). For the significance of his polemical works, see Anna Sapir Abulafia, "An Attempt by Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster, at Rational Argument in the Jewish-Christian Debate," *Studia Monastica*, 26 (1984): 55-75. Also see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Crispin's Disputation," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 11 (1960): 69-77; and Avrom Saltman, "Gilbert Crispin as a Source of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the *Ysagoe in Theologiam*," *Bar-Ilan Studies in History*, 7 (1984): 89-99. For Crispin's influence on the twelfth-century anti-Christian Jewish polemical work of Jacob ben Reuben, see David Berger, "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben," *Speculum*, 49 (1974): 34-47.

Furthermore, in the twelfth century, for the first time, though not often in the same texts, we begin to see accusations directed against the Talmud (or, more broadly, against postbiblical Jewish literature) as a source of Jewish error, as well as attempts to locate in this same Jewish postbiblical literature implicit recognition of the truth of Christian claims.<sup>9</sup> Finally, we must add another new strategy to those identified by Amos Funkenstein: arguments drawn from science—from astronomy, medicine, and physics—to overthrow Jewish claims.<sup>10</sup> The twelfth century, then, is a seminal period in the history of *adversus Iudaeos* literature.

### Petrus Alfonsi's "Dialogue against the Jews"

In this history, one figure from the early twelfth century looms large: Petrus Alfonsi.<sup>11</sup> Alfonsi's *Dialogus contra Iudaeos* (*Dialogue against the Jews*) employs for the first time in a single text *all* of the methods just identified.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), esp. chap. 6, "Polemics, Responses, and Self-Reflection."

<sup>10</sup> See Funkenstein, "Basic Types of Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages," *Viator*, 2 (1971): 373-82.

<sup>11</sup> As Charles Burnett notes, the best manuscripts of Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis* and *Epistula ad peripateticos Franciae* identify the author as Petrus Alfunsus/Anfulsus, with both names in the nominative case. But in the *Dialogi* he identifies himself as Petrus Alfonsi (gen.) and names Alfonso I as his spiritual father. Alfonsi would seem, then, to be a patronym: Petrus son of Alfunsus. However, only a page later the vocative *Petrus Alfuns* appears, suggesting Alfunsus as a nominative form. "This variation between having both names in the same case and having the second name in the genitive probably reflects a Spanish custom. 'Petrus Alfonsi' has become the standard form of the name in modern scholarship written in English, but *Petrus Alfunsus/Alfonsi* would more accurately represent the Latin forms found in the manuscripts." Burnett, "The Works of Petrus Alfonsi: Questions of Authenticity," *Medium Aevum*, 66, no. 1 (1997): 68, n. 1. For the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to our author as "Petrus Alfonsi," or merely "Alfonsi."

<sup>12</sup> For an edition of the text that improves on Migne's in *PL* 157:535-672, see Klaus-Peter Mieth, "Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi: Seine Überlieferung im Druck und in den handschriften Textedition" (Inaug. diss.: Freien Universität Berlin, 1982). For a complete translation, see my *Petrus Alfonsi Dialogue against the Jews*, Fathers of the Church, Mediaeval Continuation, no. 8 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006). All references here will be to Mieth's *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*. Although his edition is reproduced in *Diálogo contra los Judíos*, translated by Esperanza Ducay and edited by Klaus-Peter Mieth (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 1996), this printed text is marred by a number of typographical errors absent from *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*.

For this reason, the *Dialogue*, as John Tolan remarks, became “the single most important anti-Jewish text of the Latin Middle Ages.”<sup>13</sup> The first systematic anti-Jewish polemic written in Spain,<sup>14</sup> it would also become one of the most popular anti-Jewish polemics ever written, surviving in eighty extant medieval manuscripts. Alfonsi wrote his polemic perhaps less than a decade after the Muslim town of Huesca, where he lived, had been conquered by the Christian king Pedro I of Aragon in early 1097. Huesca had a substantial Jewish minority in the eleventh century. One of its most well-known figures, however, is the Jewish convert to Christianity Petrus Alfonsi, who, before his conversion in 1106, was known as Moses (Sefardi).

Alfonsi had been trained in Arabic, Hebrew, Jewish religious texts, and secular studies. These secular studies included astronomy,<sup>15</sup> mathematics, and medicine—interests that his Iberian Jewish contemporaries, Abraham ibn Ezra and Abraham bar Hayya, shared.<sup>16</sup> In his *Dialogue*, written in

<sup>13</sup> Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Carlos del Valle remarks: “El *Diálogo* de Pedro Alfonso constituye como tal la primera obra de polémica judeocristiana que se escribe en España con un ataque sistemático del judaísmo.” See his “Pedro Alfonso y su *Diálogo*,” in *La controversia judeocristiana en España (desde los orígenes hasta el siglo XIII): Homenaje a Domingo Muñoz León* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, 1998), 215.

<sup>15</sup> For a general introduction to astronomical studies in Andalusia, though without special reference to Petrus Alfonsi, see Julio Samsó, “Andalusian Astronomy: Its Main Characteristics and Influence in the Latin West,” in *Islamic Astronomy and Medieval Spain* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), 1-23.

<sup>16</sup> Abraham bar Hayya (ca. 1065-1136) resided in Barcelona and composed a number of important works on geometry, astronomy, and astrology. He also worked with Plato of Tivoli to translate texts of Greek and Arabic science into Latin. For a good introduction to his works, see his *Meditation of a Sad Soul*, trans. Geoffrey Wigoder (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 1-7. Abraham ibn Ezra (b. 1089-92), may have come from Huesca. In addition to his important role as a biblical exegete, he also made important contributions to mathematics and the sciences. See Tony Lévy, “Les débuts de la littérature mathématique Hébraïque: La géométrie d’Abraham bar Hiyya (XI<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècle),” in *Gli Ebrei e le Scienze/The Jews and the Sciences*, Micrologus: Natura, scienze e società medievali/Nature, Sciences, and Medieval Societies, no. 9 (Florence: SISMEL/Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001): 35-64; and Shlomo Sela, “Abraham ibn Ezra’s Special Strategy in the Creation of a Hebrew Scientific Terminology,” in *Gli Ebrei e le Scienze/The Jews and the Sciences*, Micrologus: Natura, scienze e società medievali/Nature, Sciences, and Medieval Societies, no. 9 (Florence: SISMEL/Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001), 65-87.

Latin,<sup>17</sup> Alfonsi defends his mastery of Jewish religious texts and points out that, while still a Jew, he had preached in the synagogues on their proper interpretation, lest some Jews apostatize.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, in June 1106, Alfonsi himself received baptism and adopted Christianity.

The motives for Alfonsi's conversion are obscure. In one sense, his *Dialogue* constitutes an elaborate attempt to justify his conversion, after having himself counseled other Jews to avoid apostasy. To do so, he composed this lengthy dialogue in which he appears both as interrogator and respondent. As interrogator, he appears in the *Dialogue* using his Christian name, Petrus; as respondent, he uses his Jewish name, Moses.

Although fraught with possibilities for psychological self-examination, in fact the *Dialogue* will disappoint any reader expecting the author to reveal the doubts and vacillation of a tortured soul, of the sort that St. Augustine displays in his *Confessions*. Alfonsi reveals no second thoughts and no period of agonized deliberation. He appears fully confident of the truth of Christianity and the errors of Judaism, which he intends to prove using reason, scientific evidence, and scriptural authority. He depicts himself as a Jew who made a calculated and voluntary conversion that seems to have been well considered, rather than the result of a sudden mystical

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<sup>17</sup> Although most scholars assume that Petrus Alfonsi must also have mastered Latin to write his *Dialogi*, Charles Burnett has recently raised the possibility that Alfonsi might have collaborated with one or more redactors who provided assistance with Latin prose. See Burnett, "The Works of Petrus Alfonsi: Questions of Authenticity," *Medium Aevum*, 66, no. 1 (1997): 42-79, which slightly revised his earlier "Las obras de Pedro Alfonso: Problemas de autenticidad," in *Estudios sobre Pedro Alfonso de Huesca*, ed. María Jesús Lacarra, Colección de Estudios Altoaragoneses, no. 41 (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 1996), 313-48.

<sup>18</sup> Apostasy was, of course, a grave concern for European Jewish communities. For a general discussion, see Joseph Shatzmiller, "Jewish Converts to Christianity in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500," in *Cross Cultural Convergences in the Crusader Period: Essays Presented to Aryeh Grabois on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Goodich et al. (New York: P. Lang, 1995), 297-318. See also Jonathan M. Elukin, "The Discovery of the Self: Jews and Conversion in the Twelfth Century," in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Michael A. Signer and John Van Engen, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies, no. 10 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 63-76. In this same volume, see Alfred Haverkamp, "Baptised Jews in German Lands during the Twelfth Century," 255-310. After Petrus Alfonsi, perhaps the best-known twelfth-century Jewish convert to Christianity was Hermann Judaeus, whose autobiographical account can be found in translation in Hermann of Cologne, *A Short Account of His Own Conversion*, in *Conversion and Text: the Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatos*, translated by Karl F. Morrison (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 76-113.

transformation.<sup>19</sup> The only clue he provides concerning a motive appears as a response to the complaint he attributes to his former co-religionists, that he had abandoned his ancestral tradition at the baptismal font to promote his career (as a physician) at the court of the Christian king Alfonso I. Both because the king served as his godfather and because he was baptized on the feast day of the apostles Peter and Paul, Moses adopted Petrus Alfonsi as his Christian name.

Alfonsi's *Dialogue* was the first polemical work written in Europe that turned systematically to a consideration of the Talmud, which Alfonsi identifies as the "teaching of your sages" (*doctrina doctorum vestrorum*). By introducing European Christians to the Talmud, Alfonsi will transform Christian polemical tradition, marking his treatise as the most important such work to be written in one thousand years. Alfonsi's approach to Talmudic material is not simple, however. At times, Alfonsi turns to the Talmud to uncover "secret" Jewish traditions that prove the truth of Christian claims; at others, he turns the Talmud into a source of ridicule and Jewish error. As an example of the former, Alfonsi claims that one finds in the Talmud at least indirect evidence that some rabbinic leaders knew that Jesus was the Messiah, understood that the crucifixion is the true cause of the Jews' exile, but have concealed this from the people.<sup>20</sup> As an example of the latter, he invokes aggadic material (that is, legends and folklore) from the Talmud to demonstrate that Judaism requires one to believe things about God or creation that contradict both reason and science.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For some attempt to divine Alfonsi's motive, see Jeremy Cohen, "The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate: Peter Alfonsi, Hermann of Cologne, and Pablo Christiani," in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 20-47.

<sup>20</sup> See Mieth, *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*, 2:38, lines 29-30. Some will contend that this leads Alfonsi to view rabbinic Judaism as substantially more odious and duplicitous than its predecessor. For a summary of this debate, see J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 201-18. For some discussion of his view of rabbinic Judaism's secret knowledge of Jesus as messiah, see Carlos del Valle, "Pedro Alfonso y su Dialogo," 218; and Barbara Hurwitz Grant, "Ambivalence in Medieval Religious Polemics: The Influence of Multiculturalism on the *Dialogues* of Petrus Alfonsi," in *Languages of Power in Islamic Spain*, ed. Ross Brann, Occasional Publications of the Department of Near Eastern Studies and the Program of Jewish Studies, Cornell University, no. 3 (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1997), 161.

<sup>21</sup> Alfonsi's multivalent conception of reason is discussed in detail by Gilbert Dahan in "L'usage de la *ratio* dans la polémique contre les Juifs, XII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles," in *Dialogo*

Alfonsi cites as instances of Jewish foolishness several passages from the Talmud that anthropomorphize the divine nature. In so doing, Alfonsi reflects an already heated debate within Jewish communities. A growing corpus of literature, produced both outside and within rabbinic Jewish communities, explained aggadic anthropomorphisms as mere metaphor or, worse, attacked them as foolish, irrational, or absurd.<sup>22</sup> Like Alfonsi, a tenth-century sectarian Jew, the Iraqi Karaite Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī, complained of talmudic statements that

attribute to Him [human] likeness and corporeality, and describe Him with the most shameful descriptions; (they [i.e., rabbinic Jews] assert) that He is composed of limbs and has a (definite) measure. They measure each limb of His in parasangs.<sup>23</sup> This is to be found in a book entitled 'Shi'ūr qōmāh'...<sup>24</sup> This, as well as other tales and acts, etc., mentioned by them in the Talmud and their other writings does not suit (even) one of the (earthly) creatures, much less the Creator.<sup>25</sup>

Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī's colleague and contemporary, Salmon ben Yeruham (b. ca. 910), also mocked aggadic portions of the Talmud and predicted: "If the Gentiles hear of these great abominations which we have recounted,

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*Filosófico-Religioso entre Christianismo, Judaísmo e Islamismo durante La Edad Media en la Península Iberica*, ed. Horacio Santiago-Otero, S.I.E.P.M. 3 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1994), 289-308.

<sup>22</sup> See Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 2.5, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), 107.

<sup>23</sup> A parasang equals three miles.

<sup>24</sup> For *Shi'ūr qōmāh*, the "measure of the stature [of God]," see Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983). Cohen has translated text and commentary on pp. 187-265, based on Oxford MS. 1791 (fols. 58-70). For an attempt to provide an early date, concurrent with the development of the Talmud, see Brook W. R. Pearson and Felicity Harley, "Resurrection in Jewish-Christian Apocryphal Gospels and Early Christian Art," in *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Brook W. R. Pearson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 69-92.

<sup>25</sup> From Qirqisānī's *Book of Lights and Watch-Towers*, cap. 3, translated in Leon Nemoy, "Al-Qirqisānī's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 7 (1930), 331. For Qirqisānī's commitment to the use of reason and science or philosophy to judge religious doctrines, see Daniel J. Lasker, "Karaite Attitudes towards Religion and Science," in *Torah et science: Perspectives historiques et théoriques; Études offertes à Charles Touati*, ed. Gad Freudenthal, Jean-Pierre Rothschild, and Gilbert Dahan (Paris: Peeters, 2001), 119-30, esp. 119-23.



they will stone us, mock us, scorn us.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, this dire prediction would come to pass in the anti-Jewish polemical literature of Islam and Christianity both.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Muslim and Christian polemicists attack this aggadic material from outside the Jewish community; Karaites attack from its margins, even perhaps on the Iberian peninsula where Karaite communities were established by the eleventh century; and within rabbinic communities, debate raged over certain *aggadot* and over their authority. This context may help one appreciate Maimonides’ insistence in the second half of the twelfth century that one who says that God has a body and form is a heretic with no portion in the world to come.<sup>28</sup>

Alfonsi’s critique of aggadic literature in Jewish postbiblical texts reflects a lively contemporary debate, then. His rejection of talmudic legends—particularly those which anthropomorphize divinity—based on an appeal to reason and science seems to echo in some ways the Karaite critique as well. After Alfonsi, Christian polemicists were quick to pick up this weapon with which to attack Jewish tradition and beliefs. Although some Jews might contend—as Nachmanides did at the Barcelona disputation in 1263—that they are not compelled to accept as true *all* of the aggadic legends or stories contained within the Talmud, many more Jews were unwilling to impugn the authority of the sages.<sup>29</sup> At stake was the sages’ authority and, consequently, the authority of the Talmud itself. This returns us to the significance of the fact that Alfonsi himself never employs the term “Talmud,” preferring instead the expression the “teaching of your sages” (*doctrina doctorum vestrorum*), but the equation of Talmud and

<sup>26</sup> Salmon b. Yeruham, *Sefer Milhamot Adonai*, ed. Israel Davidson (New York: Bet midrash ha-Rabanim de-Amerikah, 1934), 108-13; quoted in Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis: A Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Aggadah* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Anthropomorphic language applied to God was also problematic in the Muslim world. For a Muslim critique of such language from the late twelfth-century, see *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī’s Kitāb Akhbār as-Sifāt*, ed. and trans. Merlin Swartz (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 3:6.

<sup>29</sup> For Nachmanides’ view at the Barcelona disputation on the authority of aggadah, see the valuable summary by Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 142-57. For translation of the Hebrew and Latin accounts of the disputation, see *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*, ed. and trans. Hyam Maccoby (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), 97-150.

*doctrina* fully entered into later ecclesiastical literature. Thus, in a letter addressed to the clergy of France (June 9, 1239), Pope Gregory IX excoriates the Jews' "Talmud, that is *doctrina*..." ("Talmut, id est doctrina").<sup>30</sup> But in the Christian world, *doctrina* carried with it a sense of religious authority. As a result, Alfonsi seems to hold the view that one did not have the option of picking and choosing through the *aggadot*. Either the Talmud was *doctrina*, in its entirety, or it was not.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, although Alfonsi does not often attack the legal decisions (*halakha*) in the Talmud, this need not imply that he was unfamiliar with such materials. Rather, he may simply have perceived that it was a much easier strategy to criticize the *aggadot*—already subject to criticism even in certain circles in the Jewish world—and, that if these two genres could be depicted as equally authoritative, then a successful attack upon the one was also a successful attack upon the other. This strategy may be seen in the passage from the *Dialogue* that follows:

Moses: In the first place, then, I want you to show me where our sages have said that God has a form and a body and how they have spoken about this matter.<sup>32</sup>

Petrus: If you want to know where it is written: [it is in] the first part of your teaching, whose name is Benedictions.<sup>33</sup> Then, if you want to know how: they have said that God has a head and arms and wears a little box tied by a band on the hair;<sup>34</sup> that the

<sup>30</sup> For the text of this letter, see Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, 2 vols., rev. ed. (New York: Hermon Press, 1966), 1:240-1.

<sup>31</sup> Peter the Venerable seems to hold the same view. See Yvonne Friedman's introduction to his *Adversus Judeorum inveteratam duritiem*, CCCM, no. 58 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), xvi-xvii.

<sup>32</sup> In Christian texts, the view that *contemporary* Jews (*moderni Iudaei*) erred as a result of anthropomorphic conceptions of deity had clearly become commonplace by the end of the twelfth century, thanks, in part, to this work. See, for example, Alexander Nequam, *Speculum Speculationum*, 1.18.8, ed. Rodney M. Thomson, *Auctores Britannici medii aevi*, no. 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> That is, tractate *berachot* of the Talmud.

<sup>34</sup> The reference here is clearly to phylacteries, or *tefillin*. It may be worth noting that the term the author uses to identify the box, *pyxis*, is often used in Christian texts to designate the vessel in which the consecrated host has been preserved. Although it is tempting to translate these rather cumbersome expressions referring to the boxes and bands or thongs simply by the word *phylacteries*, I have avoided doing so simply because the author does not use this term, which certainly would have been familiar from Matthew 23:5—"dilatant enim phylacteria sua" (Vulg.) ("they make their phylacteries broad").

See B.T. *Ber.* 6a for the claim that God wears *tefillin* and for the passages contained in them. In Jewish practice, adult males typically wear *tefillin* at weekday morning services.

knot of this same band is made fast from the rear part of the head under the skull; that within the box there are four parchments that contain praises of the Jews; that on the upper part of the left arm, moreover, he wears another box bound in a similar fashion by a band, and that there is a parchment there that contains all the praises which are said to be written in the four previously mentioned....<sup>35</sup>

After discussing the precise location of God's *tefillin* and the source for this rabbinic tradition, Alfonsi dismisses this tale as an irrational anthropomorphism.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, later in the *Dialogue* Alfonsi responds to a talmudic tradition that God's abode is in the West and demonstrates, using the tools of mathematical astronomy, that the world is round.<sup>37</sup> He compels Moses to admit that the sun moves across the sky at a rate of fifteen degrees per hour, illustrated by the fact that the time of sunrise or sunset will vary by one hour for each fifteen degrees of longitude. Consequently, "east" and "west" are terms relative to the observer, God can have no absolute location in the West, and therefore the sages were ignorant of the principles of science as well as of reason.<sup>38</sup>

Although before Alfonsi the Talmud was virtually unknown in the Latin world, after his *Dialogue* appeared, attacks on the Talmud will become an important and frequent element in Christian polemical literature.<sup>39</sup> It

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The *tefillin* consist of two leather boxes attached by leather thongs or straps: one is attached to the left arm and hand (or the right arm and hand if the wearer is left handed); the other is attached to the forehead, with the straps extending behind the head. The boxes contain parchment(s) on which are written four scriptural passages: Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16; and Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11: 13-21.

<sup>35</sup> "M[oses]. In primis itaque michi volo ostendas, ubi doctores nostri deum corpus et formam habere dixerunt et quomodo super hac re locuti fuerunt.

P [etrus]. Si nosse cupis, ubi scriptum est: in prima parte vestre doctrina est, cuius vocabulum benedictiones. Si igitur vis scire quomodo: dixerunt deum habere caput et brachia et in cesarie pixidem gestare ligatam corrigia, ipsiusque corrigie nodum a postera capitis parte sub cerebro firmatum, intra pixidem vero quatuor esse cartulas Iudeorum laudes continentes, in summo autem sinistri brachii gestare aliam pixidem simili modo corrigia ligatam, cartamque ibi esse continentem omnes laudes, que in predictis quattuor scripte dicuntur." Mieth, *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*, 1:6, lines 8-17.

<sup>36</sup> Mieth, *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*, 1:8, lines 1-16.

<sup>37</sup> On the notion that the divine spirit or presence (*Shekhinah*) dwells in the West, see B. T. *Baba Batra* 25a.

<sup>38</sup> Mieth, *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*, 1:11, lines 10-13.

<sup>39</sup> See Kurt Schubert, "Das christlich-jüdische Religionsgespräch im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert," in *Die Juden in ihrer mittelalterlichen Umwelt*, ed. Alfred Ebenbauer and Klaus Zatloukal (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991), 223-50, esp. 232-7 for a discussion of Jewish efforts to defend the Talmud before its Christian detractors.

likely helped prepare the way for the Church's campaign to burn the Talmud in some Christian lands as a source of error and blasphemy, resulting in the destruction of thousands of volumes in Paris in the 1240s under the direction of King Louis IX.<sup>40</sup>

### Innovative Trinitarian Images in Alfonsi's Dialogue

There is another, however, more constructive aspect to Petrus Alfonsi's employment of material from the Talmud and postbiblical Jewish traditions. Not only did he identify "errors" in talmudic teaching, but he also remarked upon some contemporary Jewish rituals and practices that he believed provided additional support to Christian faith, when properly—that is, allegorically—interpreted. This is apparent in his appropriation of certain Jewish observances that he believed symbolized or imaged the Trinity. Of some special interest is Alfonsi's appeal to the ritual of the priestly blessing as a trinitarian image.<sup>41</sup>

Before Alfonsi's *Dialogue*, other Christian writers had located in the words of the priestly blessing at Numbers 6:24-27 an image of the Christian Trinity. Peter Damian, for example, in his anti-Jewish treatise written in 1040-41, found in Numbers 6:24-27 an allusion both to the unity and triune nature of God. He remarked:

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<sup>40</sup> The best-known attempt to burn the Talmud occurred in Paris between 1242 and 1244, and a number of Parisian masters were involved in this effort. Cf. Alexander of Hales (*Summa Theologica*, 2, 2, Inq. 3, tr. 8, sect. 1, q. 1, tit. 2, membrum 1, cap. 1, ad obj. 2), who noted that the Talmud should be burned because of the blasphemies it contained against Jesus and his mother, Mary. For discussion of the burning in Paris, see especially the collection of essays, *Le brûlement du Talmud à Paris, 1242-1244*, ed. Gilbert Dahan (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999); for the number of copies destroyed, see in this volume especially Colette Sirat, "Les manuscrits du Talmud en France du Nord au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," 124-5. For other discussions of the burning of the Talmud, see Joel E. Rembaum "The Talmud and the Popes: Reflections on the Talmud Trials of the 1240s," *Viator*, 13 (1982): 203-23; Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Canon Law and the Burning of the Talmud," *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law*, 9 (1979): 78-83; Judah M Rosenthal, "The Talmud on Trial: The Disputation at Paris in the Year 1240," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s., 47 (1956): 58-76, 145-69; and my own "Talmud, *Talmudisti*, and Albert the Great," *Viator*, 33 (2002): 69-86.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel J. Lasker provides a still useful examination of trinitarian images that appeared in Christian anti-Jewish polemics (and Jewish responses) in his *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977), 93-104. Alfonsi's contributions that appear below, however, are not noted.

But to prove that the entire Trinity together cooperated in making the heavens . . . let us go back to the book of Numbers. For there it is written: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons. This is how you shall bless the children of Israel, and you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace.'" And that it might become evident that this God is one, whose name is repeated in a three-fold invocation over the people, there is the immediate statement: "They shall invoke my name upon the children of Israel and I will bless them." Take note, then, Jew, as we page through almost all the books of your law, that we quite clearly discover the unity of the divine essence and the Trinity of persons.<sup>42</sup>

Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075-1129) offers another example of a contemporary Christian theologian who found in the text of Numbers 6:24-27 an allusion to the Trinity, which, he noted, was concealed from the Jew.<sup>43</sup>

Peter Damian and Rupert of Deutz understood, then, that the words of Numbers 6:24-27 contained a thinly veiled allusion to the Christian Trinity. Petrus Alfonsi went much further, however. Alfonsi located an image of the Trinity not only in the text of Numbers 6:24-27, but also in the synagogue ritual of the raising of hands that accompanies the priestly blessing known, in rabbinic literature, as *nesi'at kappayim*. Coming immediately after a discussion of trinitarian allusions in Scripture based on Alfonsi's understanding of Hebrew grammar, Alfonsi explains to his alter ego and interlocutor, Moses:

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<sup>42</sup> "Sed ut eosdem caelos tota simul trinitas ostendatur operata . . . ad librum Numeri recurramus. Ibi denique scriptum est: Locutus est Dominus ad Moysen dicens: Loquere Aaron et filiis eius: Sic benedicetis filiis Israel et dicetis eis: Benedicat tibi Dominus et custodiat te; ostendat Dominus faciem suam tibi et misereatur tui; convertat Dominus vultum suum ad te et det tibi pacem. Et ut clarescat, quia unus est Deus, cuius nomen trina super populum invocatione repetitur, ilico subinfertur: Invocabunt nomen meum super filios Israel, et ego benedicam eis. Ecce, o Iudee, dum cuncta pene legis tuae volumina revolendo percurrimus, unitatem divinae essentiae et trinitatem personarum apertissime reperimus." *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, 1, ed. K. Reindel, 4 vols., MGH, Briefe, no. 4 (Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1983-93), 1:69. For the translation, I have used Peter Damian, *Letters 1-30*, trans. Owen J. Blum, Fathers of the Church, Medieval Continuation, no. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989): 42-3. For a discussion of the text, see David Berger, "St. Peter Damian: His Attitudes toward the Jews and the Old Testament," *Yavneh*, 4 (1965): 80-112.

<sup>43</sup> See Rupert of Deutz, *De glorificatione trinitatis et processione spiritus sancti*, book 5, chap.11, in *PL* 169: 107B-D; book 9, chap.12, in *PL* 169: 193D. Also see his *De sancta trinitate et operibus eius*, 16: *In Numeros*, 1, ed. Rhabanus Haacke, CCCM, vol. 22 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971-72), 933.

The Trinity is also made known by the three benedictions with which Aaron and his sons blessed the children of Israel, according to the commandment of the Lord when speaking to Moses: "Say to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the children of Israel and say to them: The Lord bless you and guard you. May the Lord show his face to you and have mercy upon you. May the Lord turn his countenance to you and grant you peace" [Num. 6:23-27]. Indeed, during these blessings, the priest who was blessing anyone held both his palms extended before his face. And when he said "Lord" who, we said above, he expressed in Hebrew by that name as triune and one,<sup>44</sup> he raised up three front fingers, namely, the thumb, the index finger, and the middle finger of his two hands, and when he said the word "Lord" he raised the right-hand fingers higher than before.<sup>45</sup> But tell me, O Moses, how can the excellence of the Trinity be expressed allegorically better than by the elevation of three fingers?<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Although immediately above this passage Alfonsi had explained that the Tetragrammaton itself alludes to the oneness and threeness of the divine nature, he does not suggest here that the priestly figure in the synagogue invokes the Tetragrammaton, as the priest in the Temple had done. Instead, the *kohen* repeats "lord" [*dominus*] three times; earlier, Alfonsi explained that the Hebrew *adon* means "Lord" ("'*adon*,' id est dominus"). See Mieth, *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*, 6: 76, line 9. The intended emphasis of this sentence may, then, be on the fact that the blessing must, according to Mishnah Sotah 7,6, be said in Hebrew and not translated into another tongue.

<sup>45</sup> For this hand gesture accompanying the priestly benediction, still preserved in synagogue culture, see "Priestly Blessing," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971-72), 13:1060-63. One can also find an illustration of the hands raised in priestly blessing from the mystical *Shefa tal* by Shabbatai Sheftal ben Akiva Horowitz (ca. 1561-1619) in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 10:514. The illustration treats the raised hands as a cosmic symbol. At the base of the hands above the wrist are the letters of the Tetragrammaton. The illustration shows all five fingers of the hands extended, though in two groups. One group consists of the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger; the other, of the last two fingers of the hand. These groupings are separated by a gap in the form of a V. Alfonsi's attempt, then, to identify the hand gesture as a trinitarian symbol either ignores, perhaps intentionally, that all five fingers of each hand are used in the ritual or reflects a different practice in his Andalusian community. For some discussion of divergent practices in Jewish communities, see C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 154.

<sup>46</sup> "Notatur quoque trinitas in tribus benedictionibus, quibus Aaron et filii eius benedicebant filiis Israel ex precepto domini dicentis ad Moysen: 'Loquere Aaron et filiis eius: Sic benedicite filiis Israel et dicetis eis: Benedicat tibi dominus et custodiat te. Ostendat dominus faciem suam tibi et misereatur tui. Convertat dominus vultum suum ad te et det tibi pacem.' His quippe benedictionibus sacerdos alicui benedicens protensas ante vultum suum palmas utrasque tenebat. Cum vero dicebat 'dominus', quem Hebraice illo, quod supra diximus, trino et uno nomine exprimebat, tres digitos priores, pollicem videlicet, indicem atque medium, manus utriusque rectos altius erigebat et dicto ita 'domino' digitos ut prius erigebat. Sed dic michi, o Moyses, quid trium digitorum elevatione melius quam trinitatis excellentia poterit allegorizari?" Mieth, *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*, 6: 79, lines 25-38.

With this reference to a contemporary Jewish practice accompanying the recitation of Numbers 6:23-27, Alfonsi brings a new element to Christian polemics. His description of the priest's raising of the hands is fairly accurate and must reflect his own observation. It is a practice that is attested not only in the Talmud but also has been traced to the literature from Qumram.<sup>47</sup> The priestly blessing was recited in the Temple, though there is no biblical description of the ritual form, apart from a brief reference at Leviticus 9:22 that Aaron "lifted up his hands" toward the people when he blessed them. After the Second Temple's destruction, the blessing survived as a priestly ritual that had been transferred to the synagogue. Although the blessing and its ritual shifted somewhat as it moved out of the Temple to the synagogue,<sup>48</sup> and its position in the synagogue liturgy will vary as one travels from the land of Israel to the Diaspora, or among Ashkenazim or Sephardim, the ritual form itself acquired a certain consistency: the priests will recite the blessing with the the prayer shawl, or *tallit*, covering the head, with hands raised to shoulder height and palms facing forward. They touch the thumbs of their two hands, and the first two fingers of each hand are separated. The synagogue congregation is not to look upon the priest when he performs the ritual, since, when the priestly representative in the synagogue recites the blessing even without uttering the Tetragrammaton, the Divine presence rests on his hands.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Howard Jacobson argues that the practice is already attested in an Aramaic fragment from circa 100 BCE of the pseudepigraphical *Testament of Levi*. See Jacobson "The Position of the Fingers during the Priestly Blessing," *Revue de Qumram*, 34, no. 9 (1977): 259-60. For a discussion of the grammar of the biblical blessing and parallels in Mesopotamian literature, see Michael A. Fishbane, "Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 103, no. 1 (1983): 115-21. The blessing appears consistently in the Targumim in Hebrew, with the exception of *Targum Ps. Jonathan*, which presents the blessing in both Hebrew and Aramaic. See Robert Haywood, "The Priestly Blessing in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 19 (1999): 81-101.

<sup>48</sup> For example, in the Temple the priests not only pronounced the Tetragrammaton while reciting the blessing, but they also raised their hands higher, above their heads. See *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers* 11.4, trans. Judah J. Slotki (New York and London: Soncino Press, 1983), 432.

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of the priestly blessing and its ritual form in the early synagogue, see Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 498-9. For its appearance in the modern synagogue, see also Abraham E. Millgram, *Jewish Worship* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), 216.

Alfonsi draws attention to the fact that in the synagogue ritual the *kohanim* invoke the blessing in Hebrew only. He ignores, however, the fact that the priest extends all ten fingers on both raised hands, even if the fingers appear divided into groups of three and two (although rabbinic interpreters often understood them to be divided into five groups of two). To acknowledge these elements would sacrifice the clarity he seeks in his defense of the Trinity. Nonetheless, the information he provides here adds a new element to the Christian treatment of Numbers 6:23-27. Moreover, it added a new element that was integrated into later Christian polemics influenced by Alfonsi's *Dialogue*. Direct influence is evident in *Contra Perfidiam Judaeorum* of Peter of Blois (1135?-1203?). Peter served both the English king Henry II and the archbishop of Canterbury in secretarial and diplomatic roles after 1173.<sup>50</sup> In England he could easily have encountered one of several twelfth-century manuscript copies of Alfonsi's *Dialogue*.<sup>51</sup> In chapter 5 of his *Contra Perfidiam Judaeorum*, Peter reviews evidence for the Christian Trinity from biblical texts, beginning with commonplace examples from Genesis. Next, Peter turns to the text of Isaiah 40:12 (Vulg.), "Quis appendit tribus digitis molem terrae"—"Who has poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth..." Peter insists that these three fingers can only designate the three persons of the Trinity.<sup>52</sup> Then, following Alfonsi, Peter examines the Hebrew names for God to show that Hebrew grammar also demands the unity and plurality of the godhead, and like Alfonsi he argues that the letters of the Tetragrammaton form one combination and three. Next, however, Peter records almost verbatim Alfonsi's description of the priestly ritual of the raising of hands and receives it too as a trinitarian image.<sup>53</sup>

It is of some interest that Peter of Blois transmits Alfonsi's trinitarian image for the priestly blessing but does not preserve a second image that

<sup>50</sup> See Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Twelfth-Century Christian Expectations of Jewish Conversion: A Case Study of Peter of Blois," *Aschkenas*, 8, no. 1 (1998): 45-70.

<sup>51</sup> For the geographical distribution of seventy-nine manuscripts of this work known to him, see Tolan's *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers*, 100 table 1. Tolan identifies three twelfth-century manuscripts in England. For a more complete list, see Klaus Reinhardt and Horacio Santiago-Otero, "Pedro Alfonso: Obras y Bibliografía," in *Estudios sobre Pedro Alfonso de Huesca*, ed. María Jesús Lacarra, Colección de Estudios Altoaragoneses, no. 41 (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 1996), 19-44.

<sup>52</sup> "Quid per tres digitos potest designari, nisi trinitas personarum?" *Contra Perfidiam Judaeorum*, chap. 5, PL 207:831B.

<sup>53</sup> *Contra Perfidiam Judaeorum*, 5, PL 207:833B-C.



Alfonsi derives from Jewish ritual practice. Immediately before his discussion of the priestly blessing, Alfonsi identifies trinitarian symbolism in the *tallit*, and remarks:

Moreover, the Trinity can be denoted in many other instances, as, for example, in the fringes which the Lord commanded the children of Israel through Moses to have on their garments, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments, placing among them blue threads that, when they see them, they will remember all the commandments of the Lord" [Num. 15:38]. In fact, these fringes were of four threads, but doubled, having indeed on their upper portion three knots, but two on the lower portion. But the four threads designate the four seasons of the year, whereas the doubling of the threads designates day and night, namely, so that they would be mindful of the commandments of God for the four seasons of the year, (that is, for the entire year) and night and day. Now, the Trinity of persons is implied by the three upper knots, whereas the two testaments are implied by the two lower ones, namely, the Law of Moses and the Gospel.<sup>54</sup>

Alfonsi's description of the *zizit*, or fringes, is accurate.<sup>55</sup> His suggestion that the four threads correspond to the four seasons appears quite novel and, to my knowledge, is not repeated in rabbinic literature. Similarly, among Christian texts, his effort to locate a trinitarian symbol in Numbers 15:38 appears quite new. Typically, Christian exegetes understood this requirement to wear a garment with fringes as a reminder of the commandments, to remind the Jews to avoid sin, and as a means by which God intended to distinguish Jews and Gentiles.<sup>56</sup> I am unaware of any Christian author before Alfonsi to explain in such detail the construction

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<sup>54</sup> "Potest etiam in multis aliis trinitas denotari sicut in fimbriis, quas dominus filios Israel in vestimentis suis per Moysen habere precepit, dicens: 'Loquere filiis Israel et dices ad eos, ut faciant sibi fimbrias in angulis palliorum, ponentes in eis vittas iacinctinas, quas cum viderint, recordentur omnium mandatorum domini.' Fimbrie quippe ille quatuor erant filorum, sed duplicatorum, in superiori quidem sui parte tres nodos habentes, in inferiori vero duos. Sed per fila quatuor, quatuor anni tempora designantur, per filorum vero duplicitatem dies et nox, videlicet ut quatuor anni temporibus, id est toto anno, nocte quoque et die, dei mandatorum memores essent. Nam per tres nodos superiores trinitas personarum, per duos autem inferiores duo insinuantur testamenta, lex scilicet Moysi et Evangelium." Mieth, *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi*, 6: 79, lines 14-25.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of the construction of the *zizit*, see *Babylonian Talmud*, *Minor Tractates: Zizit*, 63a, 1-3, trans. Abraham Cohen (London: Soncino Press, 1984).

<sup>56</sup> See Bede, *Explanatio in Quartum librum Moysis: Numeri*, 15, PL 91:365C; Rabanus Maurus, *In librum Numerorum libri quatuor*, 2.16, PL 108:680D; and Bruno of Segni, *Expositio in Numeros*, 15, PL 164:485C.

of the *tallit* and *zizit* or to have found in these ritual objects symbols for the Trinity. Curiously, Peter ignores Alfonsi's discussion of this passage. Perhaps he had little interest in it because he could identify no direct Christian parallel. For the priestly blessing, however, Peter adds his own contribution to Alfonsi's text when he remarks that Christian practice imitates the Jews' priestly ritual, since Christians customarily make the sign of the Cross over themselves with three fingers.<sup>57</sup> In each case, however, Alfonsi's treatment suggests a familiarity with synagogue ritual or contemporary Jewish custom that his contemporaries lacked, bringing an important new element to Christian polemics in the twelfth century.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, then, we have shown that Alfonsi's *Dialogue against the Jews* utilized diverse methods to support his arguments. Not only did he employ more traditional arguments that cited scriptural proof texts, he also introduced philosophical arguments that appealed to reason and science. In the process, he introduced materials drawn from the Talmud not previously found in Christian anti-Jewish polemics to convict the Jews of offenses against reason. Equally important, however, Alfonsi introduced several innovative trinitarian images that depended not only on the *text* of scripture but also on observations of contemporary Jewish ritual practice. Some of his observations of contemporary Jewish practices, and their trinitarian symbolism, were incorporated by later Christian polemicists, helping perhaps to draw the attention of some later Christian polemicists to the *realia* of living Jewish communities.

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<sup>57</sup> *Contra Perfidiam Judaeorum*, 5, PL 207:833B-C. In the early thirteenth century, Jacques de Vitry comments too on the variant practice he found in the East, where some Christians made the sign of the Cross with but one finger. Nonetheless, he noted that since in one finger there are three parts (separated by the knuckle and the finger joint), even in one finger there is a wondrous testimony to the oneness and threeness of God. See his *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, 2, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 83.

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